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MANHUNT

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ROY TENNEY's day began at eleven in the morning.

I followed Cawber into the bedroom and sat down in an easy chair facing the bed, I crossed my legs,

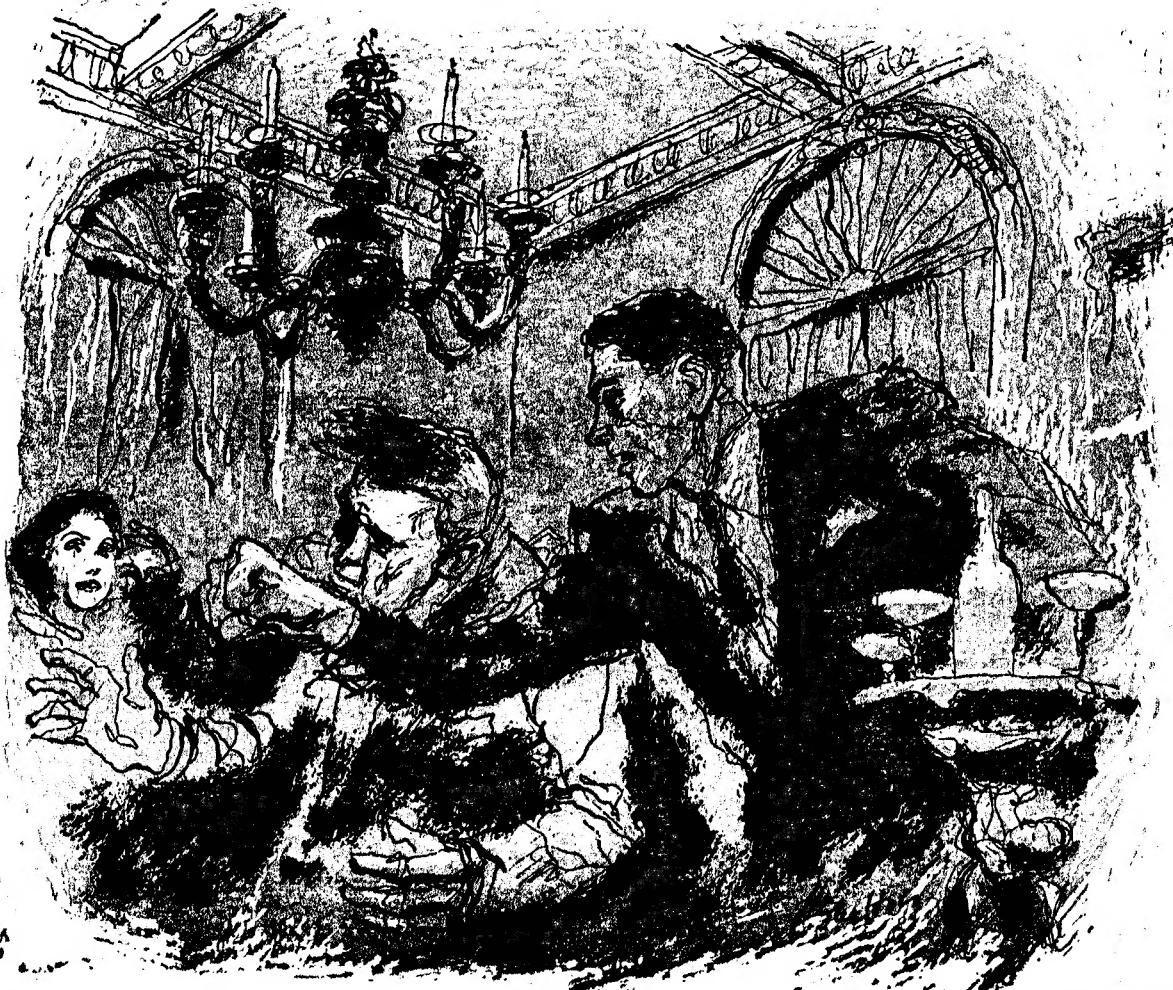
lit a cigar and blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

Cawber pulled aside the long drapes and the bright sun slanted through the apartment windows.

Deadline Murder

BY JACK RITCHIE

*Tenney ran the kind of scandal magazine everyone hated.
The price on his head was \$35,000.00 and going up daily.*



It always took Tenney about ten minutes before he'd let go of sleep and take a look at another day. He was a thin, little man of forty-five with sick-looking reddish hair. He opened his eyes wide in a quick stare. I was there and that made the world safer.

Then he sat up in nervous alarm. "Where's your gun, Eddie?"

I brushed some cigar ash off my shirt sleeve. "In the kitchen, boss."

His voice was high and skittish. "Get it right away."

In the kitchen, Cawber was pouring coffee. "You scared the hell out of him. You had your fun for today."

I strapped on my shoulder holster and grinned. "Somehow I keep forgetting this damn thing."

Cawber followed me back into the bedroom with a tray. He put the tray on Tenney's lap and left the room.

Tenney picked up the coffee cup with the fingertips of both hands and sipped. "I've got a lot of enemies, Eddie. You never know when they'll try to get me."

"I wouldn't be worried," I said. "We're twenty-two stories up and there are two locked doors between us and the corridor. And then you got me."

Tenney shook his head. "You never know. They can strike when we expect it least. A man like me has to be careful. Anybody who prints the truth has to be."

Cawber came back into the

room carrying the morning's mail.

Tenney slit open the first letter and began reading. After a while he giggled. "Jenny Williams is suing me. She wants a hundred thousand."

Jenny Williams is doing a Broadway show now, but she feels more at home before a Hollywood camera. Column talk has it that she's first in line for the big part in the film version of this year's best-seller.

I calculated for a moment. "That puts it over the two million mark."

His small jaw tried to be firm. "Nobody's collected a cent yet."

"That's right, boss," I said. "Your magazine prints nothing but the truth."

He nodded. "They all lead dirty lives. Every one of them. I can always dig up more about them and they know it. They're just after free publicity. Once they've got that, they drop their suits."

He took another sip of coffee and sighed. "It makes me ill. All this incredible filth in the world."

I glanced at the ceiling. "It's tough on a sensitive man. What you need is a vacation, boss. Why don't you try a little hunting trip?"

His face whitened. "No. You can never tell what might happen. I can't trust anyone."

He pushed the buzzer on his headboard three times and Miss Janicki came into the room with her pad and pencil.

Miss Janicki has a sallow skin,

small features and she is a tense thirty-five.

Tenney began dictating answers to his letters. After a while he used his high giggle again and handed me a letter. "This is from Rick Balboa."

I read the letter and it compared favorably with one a President had written to a music critic. I handed it to Miss Janicki.

Her face became splotchy crimson as she read. Her eyes gleamed and she went over it again. "Horrible," she said. "Vile."

"I guess Balboa doesn't care for your kind of publicity, boss," I said. "He's got a wife and two kids now. Maybe he figures that being a prostitute's regular customer fifteen years ago is something that should be dead and forgotten."

"Time doesn't erase such things," Tenney snapped. "It's the public's right to know just what kind of a man provides its teenagers with entertainment."

I looked out of the window at the spears of buildings hiding the Sound. "Did you hear his new recording, boss? It'll probably get him another gold record."

Tenney sat up. "He's a rotten singer. He's got no voice at all." He wiped coffee drip from a corner of his mouth. "Only those depraved teenagers can stand him."

I rolled some smoke in my mouth and blew it out gently. "But you like Balboa, don't you, Stella?"

"Of course not," Miss Janicki

snapped indignantly. "He has a voice like a crow."

Tenney got out of bed and took the letter from her. "I'm going to put this away," he said. "I may even send it to the postal authorities. There is no place for obscenity in our mails."

He walked bare-footed to the small wall safe and waited. Miss Janicki and I dutifully turned our heads away while he spun the dial.

While Tenney dressed, Miss Janicki, Cawber, and I had coffee in the kitchen.

"Of all the gall," Miss Janicki said. "That Jenny Williams has the nerve to use. That wanton slut!"

I put sugar in my coffee. "Tell me about it, Stella."

"Why, she had three lovers at the same time," Miss Janicki said.

I took a shocked breath. "Imagine!"

Miss Janicki was trying to. Her eyes were bright.

I leaned forward. "I missed the article."

She took an eager breath. "Well, this first one was a producer who . . ." She noticed something in my eyes and drew herself up. "I don't care to talk about such things."

I put my chin on my hands and stared at her. "I tried your door again last night, Stella. Why do you keep locking it? You're fighting fate."

She went scarlet and got to her feet. "Beast! That's all men like

you think about." She stalked out of the room.

Cawber stirred his coffee. "The perpetual virgin. One of our greatest untapped natural resources. Her idea of love is a communion of minds. She'd get hysterics if anybody tried to touch her." He glanced at me. "Are you that desperate?"

I grinned. "I'd have to be drunk."

Tenney and I were in the entryway, ready to leave for his office, when the door buzzer sounded.

He jumped nervously, the way he usually does, and looked at me. "Don't take off the chain until you're sure who it is."

I opened the thick door as far as the chain would go.

Jenny Williams' smoke-gray eyes met mine. She looked me over. "I didn't come to see you." There was the faint odor of scotch on her breath.

"Who is it, Eddie?" Tenney demanded.

"Jenney Williams," I said. "She's primed to meet you."

Tenney's voice was peevish. "I don't want to see her. I don't want to see anybody. Get rid of her."

I unchained the door and stepped into the hall. Tenney snapped the lock behind me.

Jenny smiled faintly. "How cute. The little man's afraid of me."

I put my hand around the suede handbag dangling from her arm and fingered the outlines of a small gun. A twenty-five automatic, I fig-

ured. "Did you have the idea of using this?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. One more drink and I'd be sure."

"You're suing him," I said. "Be satisfied with that."

There was deep anger smouldering behind the haze in her eyes. "That's no damn good and I know it." Her words were slightly slurred. "That dirty bum," she whispered tensely. "Do you know what he did?"

"Sure," I said.

She shook her head and the ash-blonde hair swirled. "No, you don't." She swayed slightly and put her hand on my lapel to steady herself. "The best, the biggest part I ever had." She snapped her fingers. "Gone. Just like that."

She leaned closer and laughed lazily. "They don't want a woman who had three lovers in their damn movie."

She cocked her head and studied me. "How much do you get for bodyguarding that louse? A hundred a week? Two hundred?"

I smiled and said nothing.

She laughed. "Then you could stand the smell of ten thousand?" She stroked the side of my jaw. "That's what I'm offering you to get rid of that dirty rat."

"It's the liquor talking," I said.

She shook her head and the hair swirled again. "Ten thousand in cash."

Our eyes met and for a few seconds she was dead sober.

"I mean it," she said savagely. "I mean every word of it."

Then she smiled and kissed me lightly on the check. "Ten thousand. And anything else you want."

She made her way down the hall to the elevators. She pressed the button and looked back. "Phone me when it's over. I don't care how you do it, but make him dead."

Tenney's car has about a ton of extra steel in it and it's hell to handle in traffic.

He stared moodily through the heavy windows as I drove.

"What about that girl I had last night?" he asked. "What's her name? That model or something?"

"I kicked her out at nine this morning," I said. "You were still asleep."

He was silent for a while and then glanced at me suspiciously. "How much did you give her?"

"Five hundred," I said. It was really two-fifty. The other two-fifty was in my pocket. She raised a squawk, but a hand across her mouth made her satisfied with what she got.

He waited until I braked to a stop at a light. "I don't always have to pay them, you know."

"Sure, boss," I said.

"I'm an important man," he said. "They come to me."

The light changed and I stepped on the accelerator.

"Sometimes I don't even touch them," Tenney said.

Never is more likely, I thought. At least that's what I get from the stories the girls tell me. "Sure, boss," I said. "You just want companionship."

He was satisfied with the word. "A lot of them are diseased, you know. Especially the models."

I kept my face straight. "Why don't you see a doctor?"

He looked out of the window and shrugged. "Someday."

We were almost at the Randall Building when he spoke again. "What you thinking about, Eddie? You haven't said a word in ten minutes."

Ten thousand. I smiled. "I was thinking that the carburetor needs adjusting. I don't get the pick-up I want."

I turned the car over to the basement parking attendant and we took the executive elevator to the seventeenth floor.

When Tenney was settled in his soft insulated office, he used the inter-com to let his secretary know he was ready to grant audiences.

The picture editor brought in some layouts on Mavis Kennedy. She is a taut actress who is being mentioned for an Academy Award.

Tenney scowled as he examined the pictures. "Too tame. These are nothing but portraits. She was a model, wasn't she?"

The editor blinked cigarette smoke out of his eyes. "That was twenty years ago."

"So what," Tenney snapped.

"Get the photographs. Touch up the hair a little so they look like they were taken yesterday. Use your brush to make the poses look interesting. You know what I mean?"

The editor nodded.

"And get some pictures of junkies. Or better yet, get some of the spoons and needles and stuff like that. Let the public know what a dirty thing narcotics is."

The editor picked up the layouts. "It'll be a ticklish writing job. We can't say anything too definite about her. We don't know for sure."

Tenney glared. "Her first husband took dope. They lived together for three years. He probably got her started too. It always works that way."

The editor shrugged and left the room.

Sweeney came in to report. He was a heavy man with dull tired skin and he wasn't much interested in his job any more. He got out his notebook. "I found a couple open weeks on Howard. In 1952, he took a canoe trip up in the Minnesota lake country. He went alone and he was gone for two weeks."

Jeff Howard was now in television and he had a high rating.

Tenney's eyes brightened. "Two weeks? No witnesses? He can't prove he was there?"

Sweeney nodded.

Tenney smiled and pounded a

small fist on his palm. "He used the trip as a cover-up. He was probably in St. Paul or Minneapolis all the time."

Sweeney sighed. "I'll work it that way."

"Pictures," Tenney said. "We want pictures of call girls."

Sweeney put the notebook back in his pocket. "I'll get a couple of girls to make statements. It'll probably cost a few thousand."

When Sweeney was gone, Tenney paced the thick rug. "Nobody can get as far as Howard has and still be a saint. Show business is dirty. What difference does it make if he was in a brothel in 1952 or 1955? The public has a right to know."

At four o'clock, Tenney's secretary buzzed. "There's a Mr. James Nitti to see you."

Tenney frowned, trying to place the name.

"Coppo Nitti," I said.

Tenney whitened. "I won't see him."

"He'll just want talk," I said. "It's too crowded in here for him to do anything."

Tenney bit his fingernails. "I can't see him. I refuse to be intimidated."

I lit a cigar. "I can see what he wants?"

Tenney thought it over. "You do that, Eddie. But remember, I don't back down."

I heard him snap the lock after me as I left the office.

Coppo Nitti was seated in the

soft-lighted waiting room, waiting patiently. His long thin fingers absently stroked the brim of the Homburg on his lap.

He glanced up and raised a few fingers. "You look good, Eddie."

I sat down beside him. "Anything special, Coppo?"

"James," he said. "What about Tenney?"

"He refuses to be intimidated." I crossed my legs. "How did you hear that Tenney was going to run a story on you?"

Nitti showed even white teeth. "I still got devoted friends."

"You don't want it run?"

Nitti shrugged. "If it's just a re-hash of what I see every time I look at the Sunday papers, I don't care."

"But you don't want him to dig up anything new?"

"Or invent anything. I'm having trouble enough now with those investigating committees." He grinned. "They want to ship me back to Italy. What would I do in Italy? I can hardly speak the language any more."

He sighed. "I'm respectable, but nobody believes me. I get my income from General Motors and G.E."

"And you got a daughter at Vassar?"

He grinned. "She's not too bright. I got her in a Florida college majoring in tennis. She don't mind what kind of a reputation I got, just so long as I'm steady with

her allowance. What worries me is Congress."

He stopped his smile and met my eyes. "What about the story, Eddie?"

"It's hot," I said. "Start brushing up on your Italian."

He was thoughtful and then raised an eyebrow. "Will money heal things?"

I shook my head. "He's as rich as you are. This place is a money maker."

He was silent as his eyes moved over the rich waiting room. "Is Tenney the keystone? Would this magazine fold if he weren't here?"

"I don't know," I said. "A lot of people with ten cents like to get their thoughts sweaty reading the sort of stuff printed here. This magazine is the kind of thing that doesn't die easy."

Nitti took a cigarette out of a gold case. He sighed. "It looks like I'll have to go back to the old ways then, Eddie." He lit the cigarette. "Would the story run if Tenney died?"

I took a while to examine my manicure. "It was Tenney's idea. His baby. Everybody else here is nervous about it. They know you still got teeth."

Nitti cocked his head. "What makes Tenney so brave?"

"Locked doors," I said. "And people like me. He's got great faith in these things."

Nitti waited.

"The story would be buried with

him," I said finally. "That's my good guess."

Nitti got to his feet. "It's nice to know that, Eddie." He slipped into his gray gloves. "You look hungry. Would fifteen thousand look good to you?"

I said nothing. But I didn't throw him out.

He smiled and tapped me on the shoulder. "If you're nervous, farm it out. Hire somebody. That's the smart way."

When he was gone, I knocked on the door of Tenney's office.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"It's me. Eddie. I'm alone."

He opened the door cautiously. "Well?" he demanded.

"He was just curious," I said. "No threats."

Tenney looked relieved. "I print what I want. Nobody scares me."

I met his red-rimmed eyes for a moment. You're worth twenty-five thousand to me now, I thought. But you have to be dead. I wondered if I could arrange it; if it would be worth the risk.

I took Tenney back to his apartment for a nap at six, and at ten-thirty we were at the Club Majorca.

Tenney took his regular table in the safety of a corner and he picked at his food as he studied the other tables. His eyes brightened as he watched two couples make their way to a table.

He poked me with his elbow. "There's Ronnie Hendon."

Hendon was staring on Broadway. He was a pale young man who walked with a superfluous amount of hip motion. I didn't think it had to mean anything, but Tenney had other ideas.

He watched the table and after a while he ran his tongue over his lips. "Notice how he spends most of his time whispering in that other man's ear? He gives him all his attention."

Tenney scowled at the two hard-bright girls with Hendon and his companion. "Sometimes they go out with girls as a cover-up. So that the public won't know the real truth."

Tenney sipped his ice water. "I think he uses lipstick. I can see it from here."

"You got good eyes, boss," I said.

He nodded. "Nothing escapes me." He took out his notebook and wrote down Hendon's name. "I can't stand people like that. They're depraved."

I glanced across the big room and noticed the headwaiter talking to Rick Balboa and his manager. Rick was about Tenney's size, but what was there was hard. I set myself for trouble.

The headwaiter, followed by Balboa and his manager, began threading his way toward an empty table.

Tenney noticed Balboa and he clutched my arm. "You see him, don't you?"

Balboa almost passed us. Then

his eyes flicked in our direction and he stopped in his tracks. Dark temper flooded his face.

He stalked over to our table and stood glaring down at Tenney. "You dirty liar!"

Tenney's face was white and his eyes big with panic.

Balboa's hand reached for a fistful of Tenney's shirt, but it never got there. I stood up and overturned the table. I spun Balboa, to get behind him, and pinned his arms to his sides. He cursed and tried to dig into my shins with his heels, but he was helpless.

Tenney's fright dissolved fast and a yellow glow came into his eyes. He lunged forward, his small fists flailing at Balboa's face.

I waited until he drew a little blood from Balboa's lip before I freed my left arm. I chopped Balboa under the chin with the edge of my hand. He collapsed and I lowered him to floor.

Tenney wasn't through with Balboa yet. He began kicking the unconscious singer.

I dragged Tenney away. "Take it easy, boss. No use in killing him."

After a while Tenney calmed down, but there was still a wild satisfaction in his eyes. He reached for his handkerchief and wiped the dribble from his chin.

The club manager forced his way through the half a hundred excited diners surrounding us.

Tenney stopped his loud talk by

reaching for his wallet. He pulled out a couple of hundreds and his sharp little teeth showed in a smile. "This ought to help clear up the mess."

Tenney followed in my footsteps as I shouldered my way through the crowd and out into the street.

The attendant had just brought up our car, when the doors of the club opened and Balboa staggered out, his face still dark with rage. He was a bantam cock who never knows when he's had enough.

The whiteness came back into Tenney's face and he looked for me to hold Balboa's arms.

"I'll take care of this alone, boss," I said. "You shouldn't strain yourself."

I hustled Balboa back into the club, nearly carrying him. I put both my hands on his shoulders and pressed him down into a chair. "Give it up, Rick," I said. "You won't get anywhere. Not today and not while I'm in the way."

I guess that then he really saw me for the first time. Before that I was just a wall that kept him from doing what he wanted.

The fighting anger seeped slowly out of him. He ran his fingers through his hair and started at the floor. "My wife's going to divorce me. All because of that damn article."

His fingers touched the cut lip. "She'll get the kids too." He looked at me. "Is Tenney something extra special to you?"

I shrugged. "I don't give a damn one way or the other."

I think I knew what was coming next. I had the feeling and I waited.

Balboa looked me over before he spoke again. "I'd give ten thousand to go to Tenney's funeral. You know what I mean?"

His face flushed. "I'm serious. What the hell you grinning about?"

"Nothing much," I said. "I was just thinking that things come in threes." And that they add up to thirty-five thousand dollars, I added in my thoughts.

He grasped the sleeve of my coat. "You can get to him," he said urgently. "You'd know how to do it without taking a risk."

"Maybe," I said. "Just maybe."

Tenney was sitting in the car when I came out. I tapped on the window.

He came out of his happy dream and looked at me. "It's unlocked," he snapped.

When I pulled the big car into traffic, Tenney was back to smiling at his thoughts. "I think it was that last right that knocked him out."

"Sure," I said.

"They don't scare me," he said. "Nobody."

I nodded absently. "You're small, but wiry."

"Eddie," he said. "I almost killed him. You got to help me control my temper."

"That's right," I said. "You got a terrible temper."

He nodded. "That's part of your job, Eddie. To help me control my temper. That's my one danger. I'm liable to lose my temper and kill somebody."

"Sure," I said. "You got a mean punch."

He agreed. "I don't know my own strength."

I looked at him. He really believed it.

At the apartment, Tenney walked back and forth with his excitement and he told me what happened. As far as he was concerned, I hadn't been there.

Then he went to the buzzer and pressed it twice.

"Cawber's not here," I said. "This is his night off."

He shrugged. "Fix me a drink, Eddie."

I hesitated. Tenney isn't the kind that can take liquor and he usually knows it.

He frowned. "Do it now, Eddie. Not next week."

I went into the kitchen and got the only bottle of whiskey in the house. Tenney keeps it for his guests.

I made drinks for both of us.

Tenney took a couple of swallows. "Get me that girl in the accounting department. The brunette."

I knew which one he meant. She had been here before.

"Offer her five hundred," Tenney said. "No more."

I dialed her number. There was

no answer. "She's probably out on a date," I said.

"Damn," Tenney said. "Damn it. I know that tonight . . ." He was through with his drink now and he felt two inches taller. It showed in the way he walked back and forth, almost on tiptoe. "Get me that one who paints," he ordered.

I dialed the number of the cat-eyed blonde who claims she earns a living painting portraits. There was no answer.

Tenney made himself a second drink. He walked back and forth and rubbed his head irritably. "It ought to be in all the papers."

I was thinking about thirty-five thousand. "What?"

"The fight," he snapped. "The fight."

I shrugged.

"Get me the newspapers," Tenney said.

"It's too early. It wouldn't be in yet."

Tenney was six feet tall now. "I said get me the newspapers."

For a second I considered throwing him out of the window. Then I put aside the idea and got my hat. I took the elevator down and walked two blocks to a newsstand and bought the latest papers. There wasn't anything about Tenney in any one of them.

I walked back slowly and I was still thinking about the thirty-five grand.

Upstairs in front of the apartment door, I pressed the buzzer

and waited. After a while I used my keys.

Miss Janicki stood frozen in the middle of the living room, staring down at something on the floor. Her eyes were large with fright and her hands were in front of her mouth as though she were about to eat her fingers.

I tossed the papers aside and went to see what she was looking at.

Tenney lay sprawled on his back, the upper part of his body lying on the tile around the fireplace. The blood around his head had a dull shine.

"He's dead," Miss Janicki whispered. "He's dead." She began crying and the dry-sounding sobs grated on my nerves.

I pulled the hands away from her face and slapped her hard. "What happened?"

Tears trickled down her cheeks. "He rang for me," she said, her voice breaking around the words. She looked at me for desperate confirmation. "He often does that. Even late at night when he wants to dictate a letter."

"Go on," I said.

Her face was splotched with color. She tried speaking and then shook her head helplessly.

I thought I could figure it out. I knew what Tenney was like when he drank. "He started getting damn friendly?" I asked impatiently.

She nodded dumbly. "It was horrible. He was never like that

before. Never." She stared at the body again. "I just pushed him . . . and he fell. He hit his head on the tile."

I looked down at Tenney. Dead, he could be worth thirty-five thousand to me. But not this way. Not if some hysterical female took the credit for it. I could feel the money slipping away.

And then the answer came to me. I would have to make an accident look like murder.

"I guess I'd better call the police," Miss Janicki said dully.

"Sure," I said. "Do that."

She saw what I wanted her to see in my eyes. She licked her lips uncertainly. "It was an accident. Nothing can happen to me."

I laughed softly. "You got witnesses?"

She spoke in frantic hurry. "He had some drinks. I could smell the liquor."

"Think of the publicity," I said. "Jealous secretary kills boss."

Her voice was high with denial. "But that's ridiculous. There was never anything between us. I respected him as a . . . a person, a mind."

I grinned. "You live in his apartment, don't you?"

It was true. Locked doors or no locked doors. Separate suites or no separate suites. Technically she lived in Tenney's apartment. He was the one who paid the rent.

Her face showed that she had never quite thought of it that way.

I lit a fresh cigar. After a while I spoke softly. "You don't have to go through that. It doesn't have to be that way."

She looked at me and after fifteen seconds I was the god who was going to save her.

I moved closer. "This is the way things went. Tenney and I came home at eleven. He seemed exhilarated and he began drinking. Both of us were in here with him. He wanted company."

She nodded.

"And then the buzzer sounded. I let in a man of about twenty-five. Everything about him was medium. He was about five foot six or seven. His hair was brown. His eyes were brown. Neither of us had ever seen him before, but Tenney seemed to know him."

I met her eyes. "We won't be able to identify him. Not if we look at a thousand pictures. You understand?"

She swallowed. "I understand."

"Tenney told you and me to leave the room. He wanted to talk to the stranger privately. We went into the kitchen and had coffee."

I began pacing the room. "After about a half an hour, I began to worry. I'm his bodyguard and that gives me the right. I came into this room and you came with me. You wanted to ask if they'd like some coffee."

I stopped in front of her. "Remember. We were never out of each other's sight. Neither one of

us was in the room alone with Tenney after the stranger arrived. That protects us both in case the police get ideas."

She nodded.

"We found Tenney just as he is now and the poker was next to his body. The stranger was gone."

Her eyes went to the clean poker in its stand and then she looked at me. "Why are you doing this?"

"It's the only thing to do," I said. "There's no need for your life to be ruined because of this . . . this accident."

There was a warm glow in her eyes. "Is it for me?"

"Of course it's for you," I snapped. And then I got it. Good Lord, I thought, it's got to be personal with her. I killed the laugh I felt coming. So much the better. She'd really stick to our story then.

"Remember," I said. "We identify nobody. Tenney had a thousand enemies who could hire a thousand killers. We'll let the cops try to figure it out."

"I understand perfectly, Eddie," she said softly.

"We can't forget the little things

that might trip us up," I said. "You'd better go into the kitchen and make some coffee."

She was calm now. "All right, Eddie." She went into the kitchen.

I sat down to think about it again. It was so simple and I was even on the side of the angels. I was actually helping someone. No murder. No risk.

I grinned and took out my handkerchief. I wrapped it around the poker and dipped the end of it into the blood.

And then Tenney groaned.

I froze in my crouch and looked at his face. His eyes were half-slitted with returning consciousness and he stirred faintly.

The tips of my fingers were ice cold.

Miss Janicki's voice came from the kitchen. "The coffee's ready now, Eddie. Would you care for a cup?"

"Just a second, Stella," I said. "I'll be right with you."

I took a firm grip on the poker and swung hard. I don't think the sound carried to the kitchen.

Stella made good coffee.

